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Inside Information

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FOREST FIRES KEEP COMMUNICATORS BUSY

The extensive fires in Montana in late August brought extended duty for a number of USDA Forest Service public affairs specialists.

When the extent of the fires became known on August 27, the Interagency Coordinating Committee composed of representatives from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Montana Department of Forestry, and the Forest Service, decided that information activities should be centralized.

Because of the Forest Service's extensive experience in fire situations, the agency was selected to serve as the official source of information for all of the fires, not just those burning on USDA national forest system lands.

Dick Guth, a public affairs specialist assigned to the Forest Service's Northern Regional Office at Missoula, Mont., was selected to head the information center established at the Aerial Fire Depot outside of Missoula.

Because the depot is the central supply point for all fire suppression activities in the region, it was an ideal location for the information center.

Since the fires had spread over a large portion of the state, it was necessary to establish information coordinating centers in Helena, Kalispell and Billings. These were headed by information officers Terry Seyden of the Helena National Forest, Mike Connor of the Flathead National Forest and John Gibson from the Custer National Forest.

Information collected at these locations was processed and forwarded to Guth at Missoula.

In addition, a liaison information system was set up between the center, the Governor's office and the state forester's office.

Guth said the evacuation of many residents from the path of the fires was the reason the story received such unprecedented media coverage.

During the week, reporters from all the national broadcasting networks as well as reporters from newspapers throughout the country collected information from the information center which operated on a 24-hour basis.

A typical day for the information staff, which operated in two shifts, would begin with a press briefing and distribution of fire updates at 2 a.m.

This unusual hour was selected to accommodate the morning deadlines of reporters representing major newspapers in the East and to provide materials for morning television and radio broadcasts.

Guth said the pace of the activity was extremely hectic, but that few problems were encountered in communicating this interesting story to the public via the national media.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAY IMPORTANT ROLE

The importance of good community relations in a program to eradicate agricultural insect pests was emphasized recently in state-federal efforts to wipe out an infestation of the Mediterranean fruit fly in southern Florida.

"Within 48 hours after a task force was formed in Miami," recalls King Lovinger, director of the information division in USDA's Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service, "we called an old-fashioned New England-style community meeting right in the heart of Little Havana, where the first four Medflies were discovered June 19. It was well-publicized and ordinary people as well as community leaders showed up.

"Our scientists gave a few brief talks and then answered questions until late at night."

The public information person on the task force, Dave Goodman, who later died on the job in Miami, had contacted the Spanish-language news media and made Spanish-speaking members of the task force available for interviews.

At daily press briefings and in response to media questions, citizens were reminded daily of the aerial spraying schedule and advised how to handle objects hit by the spray, i.e. wash the malathion off cars.

The result was that the community remained calm throughout the effort, Lovinger said.

Community relations played another kind of role during an earlier Medfly infestation in California. As the eradication campaign was winding down there, Lovinger recalls, the area of concern covered nine counties, far too large an area for scientific personnel to cover.

So, APHIS enlisted the residents of the nine counties in a search for remaining pests.

"We developed a full-scale promotional campaign called 'Worm Watch'," Lovinger said. "We asked the people to go into their yards, pick up the fruit fallen from their trees, cut it open and look for anything that looked like a worm. If they found such a worm, they were to call a designated 800 telephone number and someone would come out to identify it.

"Since school children were the most likely to inspect the fruit, we developed lesson plans for each of the schools, with take home materials such as flyers, key chains with Medflies inbedded in plastic (for identification), and telephone reminder stick-ons.

"In addition, 440,000 families were asked to help by direct mail. Lynn Redgrave, who lives in the area, did television and radio public service announcements without charge."

Again, good community relations accomplished their goal for the agency.

WASHINGTON STATE NEEDS TV SPECIALIST

Washington State University needs a television specialist who can produce video packages, PSA's and other program material for commercial and educational television stations.

Applicants should have at least three years major/medium market reporting background, news writing plus ENG shooting and editing skills. The position requires a master's degree in the communications field. Applications deadline is November 15.

Send application and resume to R.E. Thomas, Chairman, Information Department, College of Agriculture and Home Economics, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164-6244.

MARKETING THE GOVERNMENT'S PUBLICATIONS

"Commercial publishers struggling to launch a dozen new titles annually are generally struck dumb by the thought of marketing 2,000 to 4,000 new titles each year," writes Don Fossedal, director of marketing for the U.S. Government Printing Office. Yet that's Fossedal's job.

He admits in an article for "The Communicator" (National Association of Government Communicators' newsletter), that it is a challenge to plan a program to bring awareness of 16,000 old and new titles to about 220 million persons and, at the same time, recover the cost of doing so.

His program to do so centers on these elements: Catalogs (plugged by public service announcements), lists of new titles directed at professionals and direct mail to consumers and professionals.

When members of the marketing staff at GPO asked themselves, "Are we a business or a service?" Fossedal wrote, they answered: "We are a service that must break even."

SPANISH LANGUAGE COMMITTEE NEEDS MEMBERS

The USDA Spanish Language Style Committee is looking for Spanish speakers who have been formally trained in the language, or those who may have been--or are translators. They can use anyone who knows the Spanish language and Spanish subcultures well.

Phil Villa-Lobos, Hispanic public affairs specialist in USDA's Office of Information and chairperson of the committee, says the group will be composed of Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban-Americans and Latin Americans.

The committee will devise methods and procedures for the elimination of more than one translation of USDA material, regardless of the target audience's origin; promote and use universal Spanish; print a glossary in each publication to clarify words and phrases that proved troublesome; and arbitrate translation problems.

Anyone interested in serving on the Spanish Language Style Committee is invited to contact Phil Villa-Lobos, News Division, Office of Information, Room 405-A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or call (202) 447-3088.

WASHINGTON, D.C., NOW 'NEWS CITY, USA'

Washington, D.C., has always been an important news city. Most national news media have had bureaus in the city for years. But times are changing. Washington is rapidly becoming a news headquarters town.

The move by Gannett Corp., the nation's largest chain of newspapers and publisher of USA TODAY, to Washington is just the latest in what probably is a trend. UPI moved its world headquarters from New York to Washington earlier in the year. AP Broadcast Services, which includes the AP Radio Network, AP Wires and World Wide Network, established its headquarters in a new computerized news center in Washington late last year.

Those three moves toward the nation's capital in such a short time span become particularly significant when one considers that the only big-timers headquartered previously in Washington, D.C., were the WASHINGTON POST and U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT.

With national circulation media moving their headquarters to Washington, the city's days as a bureau town are gone forever.

DEMAND HEAVY AND VARIED FOR USDA PHOTOS

So far this year, the Photography Division of USDA's Office of Information has provided 6,000 prints and slides to news media, publishers, writers and industry organizations.

In the past few months, USDA photos have graced the covers of GRIT, SCIENCE, CAST, EPA JOURNAL, PROGRESS, MODERN MATURITY, MOBILE FARM FUTURE and HORIZONS.

Dow Chemical Company recently obtained several photos for a major "coffee table" book being published on agriculture--past and present.

In a recent week, the Photography Division provided:

109 color slides on food and nutrition to Agriservices Foundation, Clovis, CA, to be used in 40 textbooks.

55 color slides on equipment, livestock and grain elevators to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Canberra, Australia.

2 slides to the National Association of Wheat Growers for a magazine cover.

5 slides to the National Academy of Sciences for a film on food and nutrition.

10 slides to USDA's Office of Personnel for a recruitment brochure.

People who want photos from the division may write Photography Division, Office of Information, Room 4407-S, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250. The policy is that selected photos are available free to news media but that others pay a nominal fee.

DESIGNER DREAMS OF A DIFFERENT EXHIBIT

When George Baka, acting chief of the Design Division of USDA's Office of Information, was shown an article about designing publications to better reach people who cannot read small print, that started him dreaming aloud.

"What I would love to do," he said, leaning forward, "is design an exhibit for the blind.

"It would be all in braille or relief.

"The whole exhibit would be based on sound and smell and feel. You can buy different smells, you know. Kids' books tell you to scratch a page and smell the cinnamon.

"And the whole exhibit would be either all white or all black, so that we sighted people would have to experience what the blind persons experience."

Anyone want to challenge Baka?

The article, by the way, was written by Jack B. Ralph, EEO specialist with the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, in "The Communicator," National Association of Government Communicators' newsletter.

Ralph lists a dozen typographical tips that he said would be helpful in reaching people with sight problems.

They include using sans-serif medium type face primarily in captions and headings; 12-point type for people over 45 years old; no more than 2 points of leading, and less than 6 inches per line on an 8-1/2 by 11-inch page.

INSIDE INFORMATION is published for distribution to public affairs and information staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, its agencies, State Departments of Agriculture and Land Grant Universities. Any items, comments and inquiries should be addressed to either John Crowley or Nancy Bevis, Office of Information, Room 536A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or to AGR002 mailbox on the Dialcom system, or call (202) 447-7454.

